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Comparative Religion Notes.

VARYING VIEWS OF CHRISTIANITY'S RELATION TO THE OTHER RELIGIONS.

A Bishop's Word.—The bishop of Calcutta recently made the following statement, as reported in the *Saturday Review* of January 14, 1899: "The church will cherish a feeling of respect for the ancient religious systems by which she is surrounded. She will use no harsh word, nor entertain any unkind thought, about any one of them; she will hold, not that Christianity is wholly true and other religions are wholly false, but that Christianity is the perfect expression of the truth to which other religions approximate."

A Missionary's Protest.—A pamphlet entitled *The Unapproachable Uniqueness of Christianity; or, Christianity Contrasted with the World Religions*, written by Rev. W. B. Boggs, a distinguished missionary of the American Baptist Telugu mission, and protesting against what he miscalls comparative religion, demonstrates the misconceptions which a good man may have with respect to a scientific study of the religions of the world. He has had an admirable opportunity to study the actual conditions of Hinduism, Mohammedanism, and Buddhism on the ground, and as a result of this experience he is impressed more and more, not only with the infinite superiority, but also with the unapproachable uniqueness, of Christianity. His testimony on this point is of great value. But why should he object to another sort of investigation, viz., of the sacred books of these religions in the light of the Bible? Surely, if the investigation is honestly and scientifically conducted, one ought to have no fear or question about the issue. Its results ought not to differ in a serious degree from the comparison, which Mr. Boggs is most capable of making, between the average life of a community in which these other religions furnish the ideals and motive powers, and that in which Christianity is the accepted religion. The error of Mr. Boggs is the error of so many short-sighted investigators and controversialists, in comparing the most exalted ideals of the Christian religion with the most depraved examples of these other

religions. In other words, they argue from the best of one to the worst of the other. A little serious study and comprehension of the principles of the science which Mr. Boggs so earnestly declaims against would protect him from this mistake. How can anyone with a serious and well-balanced judgment write like this: "Talk about comparative religion! One might almost as well talk about comparative deity or comparative eternity! Perhaps the next thing we may look for in our advanced universities is the establishment of chairs of comparative divinity. This boastful nineteenth century ought not to close without attempting to compare the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, by the scientific method, with Baal, Osiris, Zeus, Brahma, and Thor, to see what points of resemblance can be discovered." Outbursts that reveal so much misconception, as well as downright ignorance, are regrettable, especially when coming from trained men who ought to know better. They tend to make the judicious friend of missions grieve—if nothing more.

Another Missionary Voice.—The following is an extract from a letter recently received from a useful missionary who hopes to take up studies in comparative religion when his next furlough shall give him the opportunity:

"We cannot hope to make a permanent impression upon the non-Christian world under our present methods. We must change front, revise all our creeds, send our largest-hearted, broadest-minded men into these huge fields, into these nascent empires; we must cease to treat these people as pagans destined only for eternal brimstone; we must incorporate whatever is good in these systems, find a common ground for us all to stand on, and as the centuries—yes, centuries, if not millenniums—roll by, permeate and penetrate them with our Christian theistic ideas. I hail the idea of the religious parliaments so happily inaugurated at Chicago by such men as Dr. Barrows and others. In work such as that done by that famous band of men I should gladly be engaged myself, and should gladly count myself happy to be useful on a larger scale than I am now. We want such meetings for all the *isms* of the world to see each other as others see them—men of little hearts and narrow minds will continue to condemn them. They mean well, but they do not belong to the far-sighted ones, to those who see a plan in God's methods and aim to comprehend that plan.

"I am glad of my eight years' experience. They have been invaluable in the development of profounder views of God's eternal purposes.

I have profoundly studied the religious problems, endeavoring to find reasons for some of these peculiar creeds, especially the notion of transmigration so widely prevalent. . . . I want to know more about the world's needs, men's trials, and men's hopes. It may be the Lord has even larger work for me to do yet; at any rate, I should like to prepare myself as thoroughly as possible in order to make the most of this short life of mine."

A Manufactured Religion.—It is well known that the Japanese have wonderful powers of adaptation and assimilation; and that they now insist, not on adopting things wholesale as they arrive here, but on making them suitable to the conditions here existing. They claim to be strongly eclectic, and to be desirous of picking out the good from everything. To say that a thing is unsuitable to the Japanese is generally enough to brand it as unworthy of consideration. This is the objection most commonly urged against Christianity—that its teachings are unsuited to the Japanese spirit. I have no time to enter into a discussion of this question, however interesting; I wish merely to call your attention to one more attempt, here in Japan, to manufacture a religion which is suited to the supposed peculiar needs of the Japanese people. It is professedly a rational religion, and it is widely eclectic, as will be seen from the following summary which was given in the *Japan Mail*:

"There have been many attempts to revive Shintō during the Meiji era. This of Mr. Sakamoto and his fellow-thinkers is not only the latest, but the most philosophical. The author of the treatise under consideration fully realizes that, if a religion is to hold its own in the last decade of the nineteenth century, it must be capable of being stated in terms sufficiently rational to invite the respect of intellectual men. That, Mr. Sakamoto contends, is the case with Shintō, properly understood and interpreted. But we will allow our readers to judge for themselves by placing before them the chief ideas insisted on in the monograph. There are three things essential to the prosperity of a nation: (1) morality; (2) industrial and commercial activity; (3) naval and military power. In the two last Japan is making rapid progress, but in the first, the most important of all, she is gravely deficient in these modern days. Buddhism and Confucianism, both of which in former times contributed largely to moral enlightenment, have become corrupt, and have lost their influence over men's minds.

Christianity has elements which are anti-national, and its doctrines are by no means of a class to commend themselves to our minds. As for Shinto, as hitherto understood, it would not be true to say that it is of a character to exercise adequate control over men's lives. The Shintō of our sacred books, according to which Japan is the chosen country of the gods and her people are the objects of their care, is little known. That learned men who are versed in our national history should turn atheists is utterly astounding. It can only be accounted for by considering how neglectful Shintoists have been in expounding the doctrines of their religion. With a view to remedying this defect, it is proposed to found a new society, to be called the *Taigaku-Shinkyō Kyokai* ('An association for the attainment of a thorough knowledge of Shintō'). To this body should be intrusted the task of compiling books on practical morality designed for popular use. The doctrines which it is important to teach by means of these books may be stated as follows: (1) The universe is without beginning and without end, and extends through all space. In it there is one supreme god only—Ame-no-mi-nakanushi-no-kami. The attributes of this god are intelligence, valor, and love. (2) By means of his spirit and vital energy, the god Takami-musubi and the goddess Kammi-musubi were created. These forming a trinity in unity and unity in trinity. From these gods came a variety of other deities and the parents of the human race, Izanagi and Izanami. Man's spirit was derived from God's spirit, and hence is immortal. His body was made by means of God's vital energy, but did not receive a sufficient quantity of it to be capable of existing forever. This original nature was neither good nor bad. The union of spirit with flesh has given rise to a number of feelings, which contended with each other for supremacy in man's heart. (4) Man's duty lies in cultivating the three divine virtues: intelligence, love, and courage. Derived from these are the seven virtues: loyalty, filial piety, chastity, obedience to elder brothers, sincerity, truth in friendship, kind feeling, and compassion for the unfortunate (*Megumi*). (5) The path of happiness is the path of virtue. (6) The lot of each man is settled by the gods. There is a law of cause and effect extending over two worlds—this one and the next. (7) By repentance even the greatest criminals may merit God's favor and forgiveness. (8) The actions of men are closely observed by the gods, and rewards and punishments are meted out.

"So far Mr. Sakamoto. Some of our readers will no doubt be aware that the system which is proposed as the basis of twentieth-century

Shintō is composed of elements by no means new. Not a few Japanese authorities are of opinion that the Shinto cosmogony has been borrowed from China as well as its system of ethics. The very name Shintō is derived from the Chinese classic called *Yeki*; and to the same source may be traced the chief features of the account of creation furnished by Shintō authorities. Mr. Sakamoto's seven virtues are of Confucian origin, his doctrine of cause and effect comes from Buddhism, and his trinity in unity from Christianity. Hence Mr. Sakamoto's proposed system of philosophical religion is essentially eclectic, and as such, if the history of similar attempts is to be a guide, cannot succeed."

ERNEST W. CLEMENT.

TOKYO.